Giant Terahertz Power Levels from Relativistic Electrons

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INTRODUCTION

We present measurements of both power and spectral content that confirm theoretical predictions of the generation of 20 watts (average) of broadband THz radiation pulses. The experiments were performed using the energy recovery linac (ERL) at the Jefferson Lab Free Electron Laser (JLab FEL)[1]. This facility offers a combination of very short electron bunches (~ 500 fs), relatively high average beam current (up to 5 ma), and up to a 75 MHz repetition rate.

The THz region, (1 THz = 33 cm^{-1} or 4 meV), lies in the far infrared spectral range where conventional thermal sources are very weak. A significant advancement in broadband THz sources has occurred over the past decade with the advent of coherent THz radiation emission from photocarriers in a biased semiconductor[5]. An energy per pulse of about 1μJ has been achieved, implying MW peak powers, but at repetition rates of 1 kHz such that average power levels are only 1 mW[5].

The present work describes a different process for producing coherent THz radiation by accelerated electrons. As schematically shown in Figure 1, electrons are photoemitted from GaAs, brought to relativistic energies (~ 25 MeV) in a linac and then transversely accelerated by a magnetic field to produce the desired THz emission as synchrotron radiation. If the electron bunch dimensions are small (in particular, the bunch length is less than the wavelength of observation), one obtains a multiparticle coherent enhancement[6,7].

Conceptually it is easy to understand the many orders of magnitude gain realized in these experiments by making a comparison with a more conventional (non-relativistic) THz source. We can compare the power produced per electron, and use Larmor's formula[19] for the radiated power. In CGS units it takes the form:

$$Power = \frac{2e^2a^2}{3c^3}\boldsymbol{g}^4$$

where e is the charge, a is the acceleration, c the speed of light and γ is the ratio of the mass of the electron to its rest mass. In case A (the conventional THz emitter), these carriers immediately experience a force from the bias field (~100 volts across a 100 micron gap) of ~10^6 V/m, which results in an acceleration of

$$E = \frac{100V}{10^{-4}m} = 10^6 V/m$$

$$a = \frac{F}{m} = \frac{10^6 V \cdot e/m}{.5MeV/c^2} = \frac{10^6(3\times10^8)^2}{0.5\times10^6}$$

$$\cong 10^{17} cm/sec^2$$

$$a = \frac{c^2}{\tilde{n}} = \frac{(3\times10^8)^2}{1} \cong 10^{17} m/sec^2$$
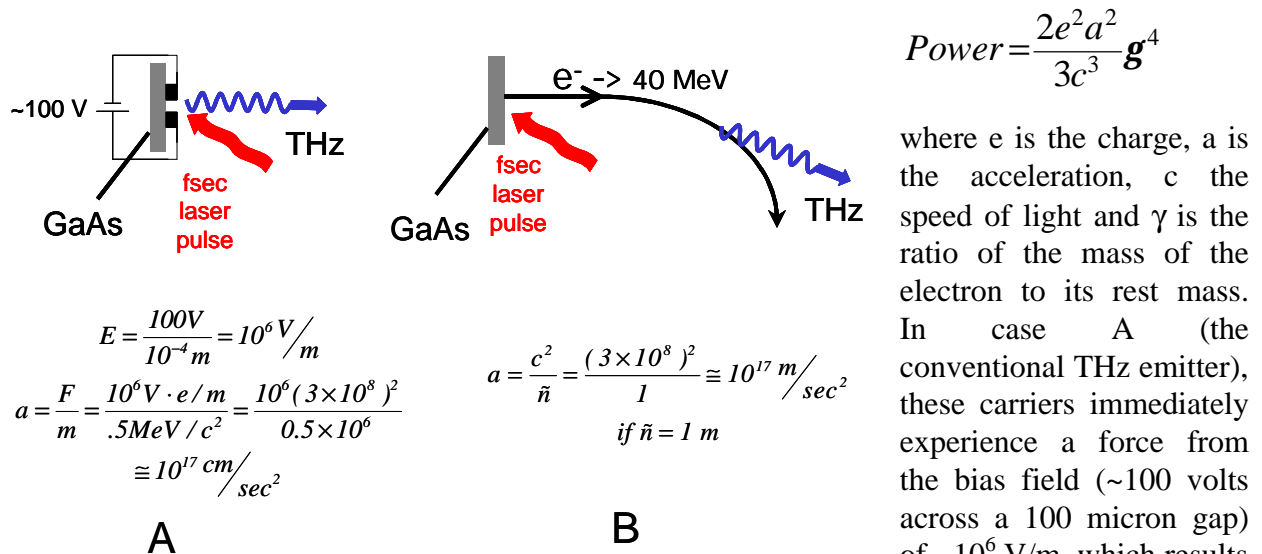
$$if\ \tilde{n} = 1\ m$$

A

B

Fig. 1. Comparison between coherent THz radiation generated by a conventional laser-driven THz source (A) and the relativistic source described here (B).
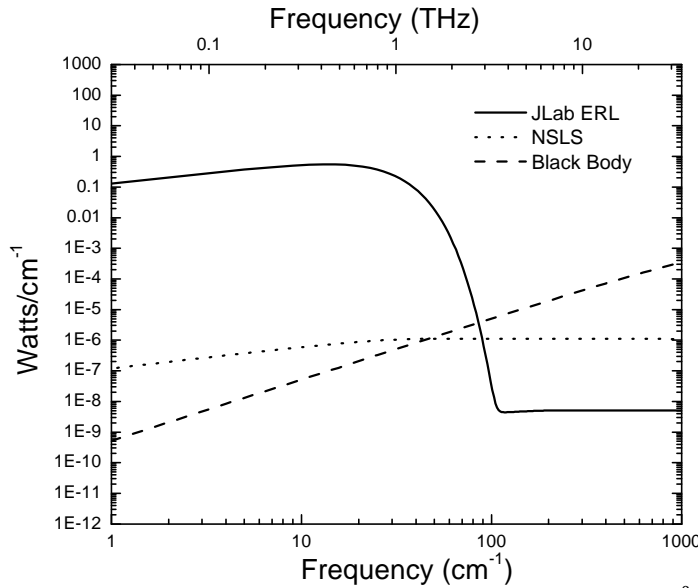
Fig. 2. Calculations of the average power emitted by a 10 mm² 2000 K thermal source (dashed), the NSLS VUV ring at BNL (dotted), and the JLab ERL (solid).

10^{17} m/s². The entire process is completed in less than 1 ps, resulting in spectral content up to a few THz. In case B, the same number of charge carriers are brought to a relativistic energy of > 10 MeV in a linac, after which a magnetic field bends their path into a circle of radius r = 1m resulting in an acceleration $c^2/r = 10^{17}$ m/sec², the same as for case A. An observer for case B also detects a brief pulse of electromagnetic radiation as an electron bunch passes by. The bunch length determines the spectral range over which the coherent enhancement occurs. For an electron energy of 10 MeV (γ = 21), an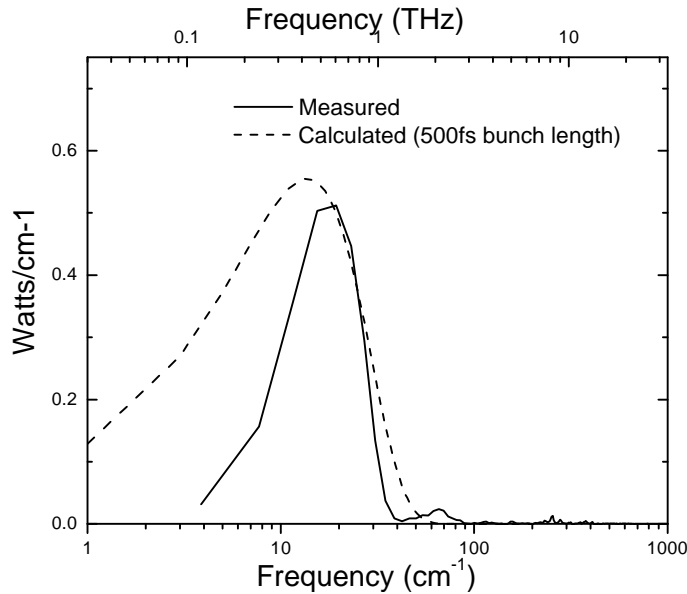d with r = 1 m, we obtain a dt of about 500 fs, which is comparable to the bunch length. The resulting spectral content extends up to about 1 THz, the same spectral range as for case A. Thus, assuming the same number of electrons, the ratio of the power radiated by the conventional THz generation to the present generation is given by $\gamma^4 = 2 \times 10^5$, with γ = 21. In practice, the electron energy can be significantly larger, but this simply adds relatively weak (incoherent) intensity at higher frequencies and leaves the low frequency (THz) intensity essentially unchanged.

The results of calculations of the radiation for a conventionally synchrotron, a thermal IR source, and the JLab source are shown in Fig. 2 in units of (average) W/cm⁻¹ over the range 1-1,000 cm⁻¹, or 0.03 to 33 THz. The superiority of the JLab ERL in the THz range is clear.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In our experiments, the electrons were generated using the frequency doubled (530 nm) output of a Coherent Antares model Nd:YLF laser operating at sub-multiples of frequencies up to 74.8 MHz, and with an average power of a few watts incident on a Cs coated GaAs cathode. The resulting photoelectrons were accelerated using a DC voltage of 300 kV into a superconducting linac and accelerated to energies of up to 40 MeV.

The THz radiation was extracted from a dipole magnet of 1 m bending radius immediately prior to the free-electron laser cavity, the latter being unimportant for these experiments. For the total power measurements the light exited the accelerator vacuum chamber through a 10 mm aperture diamond window subtending an angle of 20×20 mrad relative to the source point. The emerging beam was focused onto a calibrated pyroelectric detector, with which the total power was measured, and which confirmed the predictions of the calculations for this aperture, charge per bunch and repetition.

The spectral content of the emitted THz light was analyzed using a Nicolet 670 rapid-scan Michelson interferometer with a silicon beamsplitter and a 4.2K Infrared Laboratories bolometer. The diamond window on the accelerator was replaced by a larger crystal quartz window to increase the light collection to 60×60 mrad. An 80 cm focal length spherical mirror produced a 48 mm diameter collimated beam compatible with the Nicolet 670 interferometer optics. A

Fig. 3. Comparison between measured (solid line) and calculated (dashed line) THz spectral intensity.

switching mirror allowed a remote choice of source, namely the THz light from the accelerator, or a T=1300 K thermal reference source.

For the spectroscopy experiments, the analysis and detection system did not have sufficient dynamic range to cover the 7 decades in power difference between the 2 sources. We chose to make measurements at 584 kHz, instead of 37.4 MHz, and at a charge per bunch of 34 pC instead of the maximum of 100 pC, thereby reducing the THz power by a factor of $(37 \times 10^6) / (584 \times 10^3) \times (100/34)^2$, or approximately 550.

We show the results of the measurements along with a calculated curve for a bunch length of 500 fs in Fig. 3. We have scaled the data to fit the theory on the basis of the absolute power measurements. The spectral onset of the super-radiant enhancement is clearly seen, and the onset shape is also seen to match closely the theoretical predictions. Note that the discrepancy on the lower frequency side is due to diffraction effects.

We have another reference point for determining the absolute power since we were able to switch sources from the THz emission port to a 1300 K thermal source (the spectrometer's standard globar source). At a frequency of 12 cm^{-1} we obtained a ratio of intensity from the THz source to that of the globar of 2×10^4. To compare with the calculation, we multiply the THz source results by the reduction factor of 550, as discussed earlier. This implies a measured advantage of the JLab THz source over the globar of 10^7. The calculation predicts an enhancement of $(0.6 / 6 \times 10^{-8}) = 10^7$. While there is apparent agreement, these simple arguments have ignored diffraction and other effects on the detection efficiency of both sources. However, the result does indeed affirm the THz power.

We additionally observed the expected quadratic dependence of the coherent THz intensity on the number of electrons in the bunch, and the intensity ratio for the horizontal to vertical polarization components was measured to be 5. The expected polarization ratio for 30 cm^{-1} and 60 mrad is about 6, so we consider this to be good agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

We have demonstrated that the short bunches which circulate in energy recovery electron circulating rings with sub-picosecond electron bunch lengths yield broadband high brightness THz radiation with close to 1 W/cm^{-1} of average power into the diffraction limit and peak powers about 10^4 times higher than this.

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